

From the Wyoming Department of Health

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

Something to Think About: An Aging Wyoming May is Older Americans Month

by April Getchius
Aging Division Senior Administrator
Wyoming Department of Health

The expected aging of America's population has been known for some time, but the numbers can help remind us why it is an important situation we can't afford to ignore, especially here in Wyoming.

The 2010 census revealed that more than 12 percent of Wyoming's population was 65 years or older. By 2030, it is estimated 32.2 percent of Wyoming's population will be over 60. At that point, we will be the fourth oldest state in the union. No doubt, Wyoming is an aging state.

Our changing population demographics should serve as a call for Wyoming to consider the best ways to meet the challenges an aging population will create for our state. Will we have enough healthcare providers? Do we need more housing and home care options? We need serious conversations about these questions for ourselves, for our families, for our communities and for Wyoming as a whole.

The Wyoming Department of Health's Aging Division offers services, support and resources to Wyoming's older residents. In particular, we encourage options such as in-home care, housekeeping and meals. When these services are available they allow older Wyoming residents to remain in their homes longer, which is far less expensive than living in a nursing home. Lower costs help these folks and their families, as well as the growing budgets for public, taxpayer-financed programs such as Medicaid that already pay for a large percentage of Wyoming's nursing home bills.

We have many providers across the state such as senior centers and home health agencies that serve our residents with outstanding programs and opportunities. They deserve our appreciation. However, it's not just a one-way street. Wyoming's seniors serve and enrich our communities as well.

May happens to be "Older Americans Month." The national theme this year, "Never Too Old to Play," can serve to spotlight the important role older adults play in sharing their experience, wisdom and understanding, and passing on that knowledge to other generations in a variety of significant ways.

Lifelong participation in social, creative, and physical activities has proven health benefits, including retaining mobility, muscle mass and cognitive abilities. Studies show

that robust interactions with family, friends and neighbors across generations are good for everyone involved. For example, young people who have significant relationships with a grandparent or elder report these relationships help shape their values, goals and life choices and give them a sense of identity and roots.

In addition, current trends show that people over age 60 account for an ever-growing percentage of participants in community service positions, faith-based organizations, online social networking as well as arts and recreational groups.

We all win when older adults continue to contribute to our communities through spirited participation.

Older Americans Month offers a great opportunity to celebrate our most beloved citizens, as well as to consider the best ways to ensure they have the care and options for living they deserve.

####